



Environmental Review of a Request by the State of Idaho for a 10(a)(1)(A) Recovery Permit for the Management of Gray Wolves north of Interstate-90

What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) taking?

The Service is conducting an environmental review in response to a request by the State of Idaho for a 10(a)(1)(A) Recovery Permit to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to manage gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) in the Idaho Panhandle north of Interstate-90, where wolves are protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as endangered.

The Service will analyze the effects of issuance of this permit under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The permit would authorize IDFG to manage wolves in the same manner that the Service has in the 6 years since the Service's 1999 Interim Wolf Control Plan for Northwestern Montana and the Panhandle of Northern Idaho was adopted for northern Idaho. No additional environmental impacts to wolves would be expected beyond those analyzed in the Service's 1988 Environmental Assessment, the Service's 1999 Environmental Action Memorandum, and the Control Plan. However, due to changes in the gray wolf's biological status since 1999 (increased numbers), we are now initiating a new analysis under NEPA. The recovery goal for Idaho, 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves, has been exceeded with 36 breeding pairs documented and an estimated 512 resident wolves living in Idaho by the end of 2005. The Service considers wolves to be biologically recovered in Idaho.

Why do an environmental review?

Under NEPA, a range of alternatives to a proposed project must be developed and considered in the environmental review. The purpose of this review is to evaluate the potential impacts of alternatives for managing conflicts with wolves in Idaho north of I-90. Management actions would be intended to protect livestock and pets, and to conserve wolf populations.

The proposed action is to issue the IDFG a permit authorizing the use of lethal wolf management techniques. An alternative will be selected and a decision made on permit issuance after consideration of all comments received in response to this Notice, and analysis is complete.

What is a 10(a)(1)(A) Recovery Permit?

A permit issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the ESA allows any act otherwise prohibited by section 9 (of the ESA) to be conducted for scientific purposes or to enhance propagation or survival of the affected federally listed species.

Does IDFG need a 10(a)(1)(A) permit to manage wolves north of I-90?

Currently, the IDFG is authorized through their Section 6 Cooperative Agreement to conduct non-lethal gray wolf management actions north of I-90. These actions include trapping,

collaring, taking blood and hair samples, harassing, and other forms of take that are not reasonably expected to result in the death or permanent disabling of a wolf. Without this permit, lethal take of wolves by the State is not authorized. However, any person may take a wolf in defense of his own life or the lives of others.

What will a 10(a)(1)(A) permit authorize IDFG to do?

A 10(a)(1)(A) recovery permit will authorize, among other things, lethal take of gray wolves in Idaho north of I-90 for the purpose of enhancing their recovery, in accordance with the 1999 Interim Wolf Control Plan for Northwestern Montana and the Panhandle of Northern Idaho.

How will issuing IDFG a 10(a)(1)(A) permit authorizing lethal take of wolves enhance propagation or survival of the species?

Application of a practical, responsive management program including control (take) is essential to the wolf recovery effort. Recovery of wolves depends on establishment of wild individuals that function well in their natural environment. Removal of “problem” wolves, those that develop habits involving chronic depredation of domestic livestock rather than their native prey base, will be discouraged through non-lethal methods, such as relocating them away from domestic animals if feasible, or permanently removing (killing) them if other options are exhausted.

An established control program allows responsible agencies to resolve depredation problems, thereby encouraging cooperation from landowners in our wolf recovery efforts. A timely response to depredations can help alleviate indiscriminate and illegal killing of wolves.

What is “take”?

The term “take” means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect. The proposed 10(a)(1)(A) recovery permit would include authorization to lethally remove, or kill, wolves under specific conditions.

What is “control”?

Control actions can include: (a) application of aversive (non-lethal) conditioning techniques to problem wolves; (b) capturing problem wolves on federal, state or private lands and radio tagging and releasing them on site so they can be monitored; (c) relocating problem wolves to unoccupied areas when possible; or (d) killing problem wolves.

How many problem wolves will IDFG be authorized to take north of I-90?

The 1999 Interim Wolf Control Plan provides guidelines for conducting wolf control actions based on numbers of breeding pairs in the Northwest Montana Recovery Area, which includes the Idaho Panhandle. Lethal control will be commensurate with the goal for the recovery area, which is 10 breeding pairs. For example, when 5 or fewer breeding pairs exist in the recovery area: a) lethal control of chronic problem adult male wolves may be used only if non-lethal techniques or relocation fail; b) no young-of-the-year (juveniles) may be killed; and c) take of females is restricted. There are fewer restrictions if 6-10 breeding pairs exist in the recovery area, and fewer still if more than 10 breeding pairs exist.

As of 2005, 59 wolves, including 6 breeding pairs, are known to be present in the Northwest Montana Recovery Area, which includes Idaho north of I-90. One pair was found in northern Idaho during 2005; the other five are in Montana. No livestock depredation has been recorded in northern Idaho.

How many wolves have been legally killed due to livestock depredation in Idaho?

Between 1995, when wolves were reintroduced into Idaho, and 2004, agencies killed 61 problem wolves in Idaho south of I-90 and relocated 27 of them to reduce livestock depredations. Landowners have legally killed seven wolves to protect their livestock. As of December 31, 2005, there have been no reports of livestock depredation by wolves north of I-90 in Idaho.

How many livestock deaths have been attributed to wolves in Idaho?

The Environmental Impact Statement developed for the 1995 wolf reintroduction efforts predicted that annually 100 wolves would kill an average of 19 cattle and 68 sheep per year. Instead, between 1995 and 2004, 80 cattle, 518 sheep and 27 dogs have been confirmed to have been killed by wolves.

How long will IDFG need this permit?

Idaho will need this permit for management purposes until wolves are no longer listed under the ESA.

How can I review the application and related documents?

IDFGs application and other information relevant to wolf permits are available for review, subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act, by any party who submits a request for a copy of such documents to the address below, or calls 503-231-2063. The State of Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, the 1999 Interim Wolf Control Plan for Northwestern Montana and the Panhandle of Northern Idaho, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game permit application can be found at:
<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/GrayWolfManagement.htm>.

Can the public comment on this proposal?

Yes. Publication of this NOI in the Federal Register opens a 30-day comment period. Comments will be accepted until July 3, 2006. All comments should be sent to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chief, Endangered Species, Ecological Services, 911 NE. 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232-4181 (fax: 503-231-6243). Please refer to "Northern Idaho Wolf Permit Analysis" when submitting comments. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be made available to the public.